

U.S. Government Assistance to Armenia News

U.S. Embassy - Yerevan, Armenia

EXTENDING MOBILITY AND HOPE TO ARMENIA'S DISABLED

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*U.S. Ambassador John Evans presided
over the wheelchair distribution event*



*50 Armenians with disabilities
received brand new wheelchairs thanks to
cooperation from the U.S. Government*

Yerevan – On June 7, John Evans, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, participated in a wheelchair distribution event held in one of Yerevan's public parks. The event was organized by Counterpart International, one of the major U.S. Government-funded humanitarian assistance program implementers in Armenia, and is the first in a series of similar distributions to be conducted throughout Armenia's marzes. As a result of this program, as many as 500 disabled persons will receive badly needed wheelchairs (which are not affordable for many Armenians). The wheelchairs are a donation from the Latter-Day Saint Charities in cooperation with the Wheelchair Foundation of America and are a gift to Armenia's disabled whose mobility has been complicated due to a general shortage of wheelchairs. Fifty of Yerevan's disabled citizens received brand new, state-of-the-art wheelchairs on June 7.

In the course of its activities aimed at providing assistance to the disabled community in Armenia, Counterpart International closely cooperated with local NGOs who helped compile and verify the lists of eligible persons, most of whom have a first-category physical disability. The NGOs have also provided

significant logistical support in organizing these events.

Ambassador Evans praised the initiative and called on those present to "help break the cycle of discrimination sometimes associated with disability." He surprised members of the press corps by taking their questions while seated in a wheelchair to underscore this message of tolerance.

The activities of Latter-Day Saint Charities in Armenia, which began in January 1988, have focused on three main areas of the social sector: education, promotion of good health practices, and strengthening family values and the emotional well being of individuals, families, communities and institutions in Armenia.

The Wheelchair Foundation is a nonprofit organization leading an international effort to create awareness of the needs and abilities of people with physical disabilities, to promote the joy of giving, create global friendship, and to deliver a wheelchair to every child, teen and adult in the world that needs one, but cannot afford one. For these people, the Wheelchair Foundation delivers hope, mobility and freedom.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT FUNDS MOBILE MEDICAL CENTER FOR REFUGEES

On Friday, February 4, 2005, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy, Anthony F. Godfrey, officially dedicated a mobile medical diagnostic clinic for refugees. The mobile clinic, with equipment provided by the United States, and staffed by doctors and specialists from the "Mission Armenia" NGO, can travel to community centers throughout Armenia and assist those that do not have access to a hospital. The mobile clinic features a blood chemical analyzer, a urine analysis machine and an ultrasound system. With this equipment, refugees with the greatest need can receive diagnostic services, helping avert preventable illness. The mobile clinic will effectively target assistance to approximately 8,000 bedridden elderly refugees in 10 marzes.

The \$19,000 of medical equipment purchased for the mobile clinic was funded through the U.S. Ambassador's Refugee Fund, a special U.S. Department of State budget

allocated for humanitarian relief projects aimed at helping the Armenian refugee community.

The need for mobile medical care is critical among refugees, who often find it hard to obtain proper medical treatment. Mission Armenia currently provides community-based healthcare services in 254 community centers through qualified staff members, but lacks sufficient diagnostic equipment. Thanks to the U.S. Government, the new mobile diagnostic clinic will help address this urgent need.

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U.S. SPONSORS CHILDREN'S TOLERANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Earlier this year, Save the Children launched the Children's Tolerance Education Project, a regional program co-funded by USAID and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The two-year program is designed to promote tolerance, cooperation and compassion in three South Caucasus countries: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The official Armenia program launch was held at the Marriott Hotel in Yerevan. Guests included U.S. Ambassador John Evans, representatives from USAID, the Director of Pre-School Education from the Ministry of Education and the Chief Producer of h2 Television. Representatives from local and international NGOs and Save the Children were also in attendance.

The Children's Tolerance Education Project targets children aged five to eleven, along with their teachers and caregivers, by teaching conflict transformation concepts, critical thinking and cross cultural communication skills. Ambassador Evans praised the targeting of this age group, calling it "one of the most formative periods of a child's life."

The project will feature a regional children's television series composed of 36 episodes. While the scripts of the episodes will be the same in each country, the series will be locally produced in each national language.

Each episode is designed to be both entertaining and educational by presenting different situations in which the characters address concepts of tolerance, problem-solving, communication, negotiation, mediation,

environmental stewardship, gender equity, stereotyping and trust.

In order to enhance and support the aims of the television series and to ensure that each episode effectively promotes the goal concepts, Save the Children has created national and regional panels of experts who form the Children's Tolerance Education Association (CTEA). The CTEA consists of local conflict resolution and childhood development experts, child psychologists, puppet theater directors and TV producers. These experts will review the scripts and provide recommendations, while building trust among the partners in each country.



Performers teach children how to resolve conflicts through an interactive puppet show

For more information about this or any other Save the Children program, please e-mail: save@save.airnet.am or visit www.usa.am/assistance

U.S. GRANTS \$400K X-RAY EQUIPMENT GRANT TO ARMENIAN CUSTOMS



*Deputy Chief of Mission, Anthony Godfrey,
participates in official ceremony with Karen
Janoyan, the Head of the Armenian Customs House*



*Karen Janoyan, Head of the Armenian
Customs House, formally acknowledges
receipt of customs equipment*

The U.S. Embassy Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance (EXBS) program recently donated cargo and luggage X-ray equipment valued at \$393,225 to the Government of Armenia. The Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy, Anthony F. Godfrey, and the Head of the Armenian Customs House, Karen Janoyan, participated in the official ceremony held at the Zvartnots Air Cargo Terminal. The equipment will help the Customs Service of Armenia examine cargo and baggage entering and leaving the country. X-ray units are already installed at Zvartnots Airport, and new units will soon be functioning at Gyumri Airport, as well as at the land borders at Meghri and Bagratashen. The largest X-ray unit, installed and in use at the Zvartnots Air Cargo Terminal in Yerevan, is the first one of its size in Armenia, and can screen entire pallets of cargo.

The EXBS program, administered by the Department of State, has been operating in Armenia since 1999. The program operates in more than 45 countries, and is designed to strengthen a country's export control system by providing legal and regulatory advice, training of licensing officials, enforcement and interdiction equipment and industry to government outreach.

This program will vastly improve export controls and border security throughout the country, as well as show full support in the worldwide fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, conventional weapons and related materials. The EXBS Program in Armenia also continues to conduct formal training seminars both locally and in the United States in an effort to provide Border Guards and Customs Inspectors with the advanced techniques of investigation necessary to identify sophisticated nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Over the last several years the EXBS program has equipped the Border Guards and Customs Services of Armenia with various types of inspection and detection equipment: a radio-communication system, several types of border sensors, metal detectors, vehicles, computer equipment, cargo truck scales and X-ray units. Last year, the EXBS program initiated several construction projects to upgrade the customs border facility at Bagratashen: for border guards barracks at the Gogavan Port of Entry and both border guard and customs training facilities in Yerevan. These facilities will serve Armenia and its neighbors well into the future.

THANKS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, CHILDREN SLEEP EASIER IN NEW BUNK BEDS

In March 2005, Counterpart's International Community and Humanitarian Assistance Program CHAP/Armenia assisted the Abovyan Special Boarding School with 25 bunk beds. The children were very happy, as they had been sleeping on old and dilapidated beds and mattresses. 110 disadvantaged and vulnerable children are served by this facility. Most of these children are from Abovyan and the neighboring villages of Kotayk Marz. Their families are socially and economically vulnerable, and often the boarding school is the only place that provides for their children. There are 55 day students and 50 resident children at the facility. The school has experienced difficulties with furniture since the collapse of the Soviet

Union, and nothing has been replaced in the past 15 years because of severe financial problems.

The new beds are expected to last at least 20 years. The children are now housed in well-furnished, comfortable rooms. Their improved conditions are the result of the work of Counterpart International and other donor organizations, together with the dedicated staff, who all worked together to make this possible.

Counterpart International's CHAP/Armenia office will continue to help with clothing, desks and furniture for both the school and its canteen, but the staff and children always welcome any kind of assistance.



Donated beds bring a good night's sleep to children at the Abovyan Special Boarding School.



U.S. IMPROVES HEALTH SERVICES IN RURAL ARMENIA



Some of the youngest beneficiaries of USAID's Project NOVA

A five-year, \$7.2 million project was launched in 2004 which will build on the successes of its predecessor, project PRIME II. The project, awarded to Emerging Markets Group (EMG) and implemented by IntraHealth International and Save the Children, will work to improve reproductive and child health services for people living in rural areas nationwide. Government health statistics and independent surveys show that these health services are in particular need of improvement in Armenia. Some health concerns include: rural women delivering children at home, the increasing infant mortality rates, abortion as a

form of fertility control and the low use of modern forms of contraception. NOVA (the transliterated Armenian acronym for Innovations in Support of Reproductive Health) will address these issues by improving the knowledge and skills of rural primary health care (PHC) providers, developing the capacity of regional health managers, accelerating the momentum of reform in the health delivery system to be more responsive to needs and increasing consumer demand for high-quality services through community education and mobilization activities.

U.S. EMBASSY OPENS COMPUTER LEARNING CENTER FOR ASPIRING JOURNALISTS



Thanks to the U.S., students take advantage of their newly renovated computer lab



Deputy Chief of Mission, Anthony Godfrey, officially opens the new computer lab

Earlier this year, the U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), Anthony F. Godfrey, officially opened a new computer lab in the Journalism Department of the Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute (GSPI). The U.S. Embassy installed 21 computers, provided over 100 books on journalism and fully refurbished the computer lab. This new computer learning center is part of the U.S. State Department University Partnership Program which has connected GSPI with Florida A&M University in the United States. Florida A&M is working with the GSPI Journalism School to train faculty and develop new journalism curriculum and support materials.

Two professors from Florida A&M University, Jesse L. Lutabingwa, PhD, Assistant Vice President of International Education and Development, and Joseph Ippolito, PhD, Professor of Journalism, attended the opening in Gyumri.

DCM Anthony F. Godfrey, addressing faculty and students of the GSPI Journalism School, stated, "Professional journalism is part of the foundation of democratic society. The U.S. Government actively supports the training and development of Armenia's next generation of investigative journalists, news anchors and editors." Turning to

the aspiring journalists, he encouraged them to make a commitment to this important part of Armenia's civil society by "asking hard questions, doing your research and keeping at it."

The goals of this University Partnership Program, of which the new computer lab is a part, is to enhance the capacity of GSPI to offer advanced journalism training and thus contribute to the professional development of the Armenian press.

It is anticipated that the partnership will:

1. Provide increased opportunities for faculty exchanges that promote greater awareness of other cultures, educational practices and work environments at Florida A&M and GSPI.
2. Strengthen curricular offerings at GSPI to produce a more skilled and marketable workforce, while working to expand the learning opportunities for faculty, students and staff at both institutions.
3. Provide the foundation for developing a long-term strategic plan for future Florida A&M and GSPI collaboration, with a particular focus on advanced journalism education and training.

U.S. SUPPORTS GROUNDBREAKING GREENHOUSE PROJECT

Greenhouse growers face the challenge of producing fresh flowers and vegetables in production units that are cost effective. According to experts in the greenhouse industry, a main constraint to profitability in Armenia is not low consumer demand, but the high cost of energy needed to keep the winter growing environment at a temperature conducive to good crop production.

A groundbreaking greenhouse just completed in the Lake Sevan Region may change the profitability equation from now on. Aregooni Village greenhouse grower, Aram Hovannisyan, in partnership with USDA and Dan Retz of the U.S. Peace Corps, designed and constructed the most advanced energy efficient greenhouse production system in Armenia. There are several components that make this system attractive from an economic, environmental and household nutrition point of view. The "straw bale" greenhouse contains 50 square meters of growing space. The space is heated using "passive" solar design with large plastic windows facing south. Light passes through the glaze, striking a series of 200-liter recycled oil drums filled with water. The walls are made from bales of wheat straw grown in the village, which provide insulation. They are covered with coated plastic sheeting for temporary protection, but the bales will be sealed with clay plaster as soon as the weather allows. The framing came from poplar tree branches and recycled scrap metal stockpiled in the village.

According to Paul Sommers of USDA, this project was a partnership from the very start. Mr. Hovannisyan approached the U.S. Government with his concept to produce vegetables for his small community in the cold season. He asked the Peace Corps if Dan Retz, who designed and built Armenia's first straw bale cold storage facility in 2004, could review the plan and provide guidance. They worked together and came up with a greenhouse design that would operate 100% on renewable energy from the sun and use mostly locally grown and/or recycled materials.



*Local farmers enjoy working
in the passive solar straw bale greenhouse*

Dan Retz says that this was perhaps the ideal in a Peace Corps assignment. "Aram hosted me at his home for the entire process. He and his family contributed most of the labor. Fellow villagers were called in at peak times to raise a wall or for other heavy lifting. We would have spirited discussions about technical aspects, and in the end, we both agreed on the way forward. At all times, there was genuine collaboration."

According to Retz, the greenhouse is working like a charm. Temperature records show that when the outside temperature is 0°C at 2:00 pm, the inside temperature is 40°C. Acceptance of the greenhouse was evident long before completion. Visitors from as far away as Noembarian have visited the project to assess for themselves the merits and agreed they would build a similar structure on their own.

The next stage is to monitor the growth of the plants and make adjustments as needed. Dr. Gayane Martirosian, one of Armenia's top greenhouse specialists, is serving as a consultant to the pioneering project. She says that, if successful, the economic implications should be very positive for growers in high mountain environments, especially in the winter season.

NUTRITION FOR ARMENIA'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



*Direct beneficiaries of the U.S. Government -funded/UMCOR
Cheese Distribution Program*

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Cheese Distribution Program is one of the humanitarian programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. The main goal of the program is to support vulnerable beneficiaries living in state institutions and improve their basic nutrition. The program was first started in 1999. Since then UMCOR has purchased and distributed about 445 MT of locally produced cheese, benefiting a total of some 50,000 people in orphanages, retirement centers, special schools, mental hospitals and several soup kitchens throughout the Republic of Armenia.

The next phase of the distribution will commence in January 2005, and will last until mid-2005. During this four month period, UMCOR will deliver 42MT of locally produced cheese with a total value

of \$100,000. 85 institutions will benefit from the program. The total number of beneficiaries will be 13,500; 11,000 of whom will be children.

The Cheese Program provides each beneficiary with 40 grams of cheese per day, 7.5% of the average daily energy requirement.

During this period, UMCOR will implement the program with the support of six local Cheese producers, namely Stepanavan Lipo cheese Factory OSC, Karakhach LTD, Amasia Chief Cheese Factory, Ashotsk Cheese Factory OSC, Gavar Snndart LTD and Fedron LTD. The program has benefited the Armenian dairy industry, from farmer families to cheese makers. Cheese makers have reported a 10% increase in employment as a result of the program.



*Children of Gyumri enjoying lunch
supplemented by UMCOR*



Cheese storage in a local kindergarten

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE ACCOUNT: ARMENIA UPDATE

On January 23, 2004, President Bush established the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a U.S. Government corporation, to administer the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), an innovative new foreign assistance program designed to eliminate extreme poverty and promote sustainable economic growth. The MCA grew out of the U.S. commitment at the Monterrey Summit on Financing for Development, as President Bush said, "to provide greater resources for developing countries taking greater responsibility for their own development." The MCC Board selects MCA eligible countries based on their demonstrated commitment to "ruling justly, investing in people, and encouraging economic freedom."

Armenia was selected as an MCA eligible country for fiscal years 2004 and 2005. On March 28, 2005, Armenia submitted a proposal to the MCC. Armenia's proposal is to reduce rural poverty by a projected 5% by 2009 through increased agricultural productivity and improved access of

the rural populations to markets and services. The proposed program outlines how this might be accomplished through strategic investments in irrigation and rural roads.

The MCC is currently undergoing preliminary due diligence of the proposed program. As part of this process, MCC technical experts are working closely with the Government of Armenia's Millennium Challenge Account team to ensure that interventions will reach their intended beneficiaries in a manner that is open, transparent and efficient. Following due diligence and the development of a satisfactory proposed program, the proposed program will be submitted to MCC's management and Board, and, if approved, notified to the U.S. Congress in accordance with MCC's governing statute.

Details of the proposed program as well as regular updates on the consultative process can be obtained via the web at www.mca.am.

BEYOND "CHARITY:" U.S. GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES INVESTMENT IN ARMENIA

The USAID Micro Enterprise Development Initiative (MEDl) is organizing a micro finance investors conference (MFIC) on October 25, 2005, at the Hotel Armenia (Marriott) in Yerevan. The purpose of the MFIC is to provide an easy and cost effective way for investors to become knowledgeable about Armenian and Georgian microfinance institutions (MFIs) and in so doing, help them to attract foreign direct investment.

The MFIC marks a huge step forward in the evolution of the Armenian and Georgian micro finance sectors. Most Armenian and Georgian MFIs were established within the past five to ten years with grants from donors such as USAID. The need for donor funding was driven by the fact that, during that time, micro and small business owners had virtually no place they could go to apply for a loan to finance the growth of their businesses, and in so doing, increase their incomes. Over the past few years, however, many of these MFIs have

evolved into sophisticated credit institutions with thousands of clients and loan portfolios valued at several million dollars each. (The average loan of most MFIs is less than five hundred dollars.) In order for these MFIs to maintain their high growth rates and serve the tens of thousands of micro-entrepreneurs who still lack access to credit, they need to secure debt and equity from the international capital markets.

MFIs from both Armenia and Georgia have indicated their eagerness to participate in the MFIC, as have several international investment funds specializing in micro finance, including Oikocredit and Blue Orchard Finance, as well as the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group. Approximately eight to ten MFIs from both countries will be pre-selected by investors to make presentations during the conference. For more information on this important event, please visit www.medi.am.